

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

October 16, 1972

Dear President Thieu:

I have asked Dr. Henry Kissinger to convey to you this personal letter regarding our current negotiations with North Vietnam which now appear to be reaching a final stage.

As you know, throughout the four years of my Administration the United States has stood firmly behind your Government and its people in our support for their valiant struggle to resist aggression and preserve their right to determine their own political future.

The military measures we have taken and the Vietnamization program, the dramatic steps that we took in 1970 against the Cambodian sanctuaries, the operations in Laos in 1971 and the measures against North Vietnam just this past May have fully attested to the steadfastness of our support. I need not emphasize that many of these measures were as unpopular to many in the U.S. as they were necessary.

At the negotiating table we have always held firmly to the principle that we would never negotiate with North Vietnam a solution which predetermined the political outcome of the conflict. We have consistently adhered to positions that would preserve the elected government and assure the free people of Vietnam the opportunity to determine their future.

Until very recently the North Vietnamese negotiators have held firmly to their long-established position that any settlement of the war would have to include your resignation and the dismantlement of the Government of the Republic of Vietnam and its institutions.



It now seems, however, that the combination of the perseverance and heroism of your Government and its fighting forces, the measures taken by the United States on the 8th of May, 1972, and our firmness at the conference table have caused a fundamental shift in Hanoi. In the course of Dr. Kissinger's recent meetings with the North Vietnamese negotiators in Paris, it has become progressively more evident that Hanoi's leadership is prepared to agree to a ceasefire prior to the resolution of the political problem in South Vietnam. This is indeed an important reverse in doctrine and must represent a decision for them which cannot have been taken lightly. They know the weakness of their own political forces in the South and therefore the risks involved in reaching an agreement that does not meet their political objectives must indeed for them be great.

The consequence of this change in strategy has resulted in a situation wherein we and Hanoi's negotiators have reached essential agreement on a text which provides for a cessation of hostilities, the withdrawal of remaining allied forces, the exchange of prisoners of war, and the continued existence of your Government and its institutions after the ceasefire takes effect. In addition to the document itself a number of private assurances have been obtained designed to meet the security concerns of your country and whose implementation we consider an essential part of this agreement.

Dr. Kissinger will explain to you in the fullest detail the provisions of the proposed agreement which he carries with him and I will therefore not provide further elaboration in this message. I do, however, want you to know that I believe we have no reasonable alternative but to accept this agreement. It represents major movement by the other side, and it is my firm conviction that its implementation will leave you and your people with the ability to defend yourselves and decide the political destiny of South Vietnam.

As far as I am concerned, the most important provision of this agreement, aside from its military features, is that your Government, its armed forces and its political institutions, will remain intact after the ceasefire has been observed. In the period



following the cessation of hostilities you can be completely assured that we will continue to provide your Government with the fullest support, including continued economic aid and whatever military assistance is consistent with the ceasefire provisions of this government.

I recognize that after all these years of war a settlement will present an enormous challenge to your leadership and your people. We all recognize that the conflict will now move into a different form, a form of political struggle as opposed to open military confrontation; but I am of the firm conviction that with wisdom and perseverance your Government and the people of South Vietnam will meet this new challenge. You will have my absolute support in this endeavor and I want you to know it is my firm belief that in this new phase your continued leadership of the destiny of South Vietnam is indispensable.

Finally, I must say that, just as we have taken risks in war, I believe we must take risks for peace. Our intention is to abide faithfully by the terms of the agreements and understandings reached with Hanoi, and I know this will be the attitude of your government as well. We expect reciprocity and have made this unmistakably clear both to them and their major allies. I can assure you that we will view any breach of faith on their part with the utmost gravity; and it would have the most serious consequences.

Allow me to take this occasion to renew my sentiments of highest personal regard and admiration for you and your comrades in arms.

Sincerely,

*Richard Nixon*

His Excellency  
Nguyen Van Thieu  
President of the

Republic of Vietnam  
Saigon

*Dr. Kissinger, General Haig  
and I have discussed this  
proposal at great length.*

*I am personally convinced  
it is the best we will be able to get and  
that it meets my absolute condition -  
that the GVN must survive as a  
free country. Dr. Kissinger's comments  
have my total backing. (RWN)*